

The Upstream Journal

Guatemala

Indigenous people
seek alternatives



Wal-Mart threatens Maya ruins
Surveillance of people in China
Arms sold to Sudan

Publication of the
Social Justice Committee

Dear readers,

Some friends and I were passing time on a hot summer day in the Adirondacks by visiting some folks building a yurt. Mostly we were curious about what a yurt is and why someone would build one, but we also offered to help a bit if they could use a few hands for an afternoon. So we carried lumber and supplies up the trail from the road, took down some scaffolding and stacked it, and did some other basic grunt work while a few hours of plentiful mountain time went by.

Later, one of my friends said he had overheard the guy talking about us when he and his helper thought we had all left. He was reflecting on how they had been behind schedule and the work piling up, and yet strangers had appeared out of nowhere to help, and now they were back on track. He called us a group of angels.

Angels like these are essential to the Social Justice Committee too.

To our continuing astonishment and gratitude, volunteers fill the office with their terrific talent, ideas and energy, and the mail brings donations from people who trust we will spend their money well.

The SJC's Ernie Schibli got to be an angel himself, joining a community in Guatemala as they presented their demands for a say as their land is opened to gold mining. When we were asked to help a community in Guatemala, we were able to spread their story around the world. In just a few days, we got over seventy groups to support their demands for fair consultations. The mine is financed by the World Bank, so the SJC staff person in Washington met with officials in Washington to relay the community's concerns and to gather information to help their effort.

This issue of the Upstream Journal tells part of their story, and we'll keep you posted as the campaign moves forward.

By the way, this isn't the first time Ernie was described as an angel. Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu calls him her "guardian angel" for being one of the people that accompanied her in her return to Guatemala from exile at a time of military oppression.

Derek MacCuish
Editor

Stories that need telling

Farmers in rural Senegal are among the poorest people in the world, facing a bleak future. Their crops fail as the weather patterns change and the rains don't come.

They can't sell their main crop of peanuts for a good price because of privatization and a changing world market. Even mass produced European chicken is cheaper than local.

The **Upstream Journal** wants to tell the story of people in rural West

Africa. How are they responding? What hopes can they give their children?

You can help. With your financial assistance, we can get the stories and the photos to bring their situation and their efforts to respond to our readers.

If you want to sponsor a "story that needs telling," please send your donation today.

The Upstream Journal is a free publication of the Social Justice Committee. It is one of several educational materials we offer on human rights and development.

Donations to the SJC are welcome, and go to support a range of activities. The SJC is a registered charity in Canada, and donations are tax deductible. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Please consider making a donation and becoming a member. You can use the reply form on the back cover of this Upstream Journal, or call us (toll free in North America) at 1-866-RIGHTS-2.

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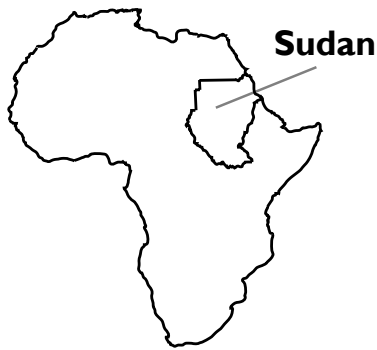
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Photos Morguefile.com, Imageafter.com

Contributing to GENOCIDE in Sudan

Camille Khoury



A nineteen-year-old woman in a Chad refugee camp described this attack on her village in Darfur, Sudan last spring.

“I was living with my family in Tawila and going to school when one day the Janjaweed came and attacked the school. We all tried to leave the school but we heard noises of bombing and started running in all directions...The Janjaweed caught some girls. I was raped by four men inside the school... When I went back to town, I found that they had destroyed all the buildings. Two planes and a helicopter had bombed the town. One of my uncles and a cousin were killed in the attack.”

Arms producing nations ignore embargos set by UN and EU. Profit margins override any civilian consequences.

Villages in Darfur are under constant threat of attack. The tactics the attackers use are typical of those used by the Janjaweed, a government-sponsored militia.

The Sudanese air force strikes before the Janjaweed enters a village or town. The Russian-built fighter jets and Belarussian helicopter gunships rain bombs onto Darfuri targets as Janjaweed militiamen surround the area on horseback and in government-supplied jeeps. As men, women and children scramble to save themselves, the Janjaweed seize upon the chaos to slaughter the men with rifles and ammunition made in France or Iran. The women are raped, and the village looted and set ablaze.

Antonov cargo aircraft from China re-supply the Janjaweed militiamen with ammunition, food and water provided by the Sudanese government.

THIS SCORCHED EARTH POLICY has displaced nearly 1.5 million Darfuris and resulted in the death of 70,000 more. The militia is accused of ethnic cleansing and even genocide against the black African population in Darfur. The government is attempting to quell uprisings from Darfuris who originally claimed that Arabs in Sudan were receiving favor-

able treatment over black Africans.

The role of arms-producing nations in supporting the conflict and contributing to the murder of thousands of Darfuris is seldom considered, but a recent Amnesty International report has exposed the source of the government’s weapons supply, and hence its capacity to arm the Janjaweed.

Although there is a general arms embargo in place by the European Union and the United Nations Security Council, many participating countries have been reluctant to comply with it.

A MAJOR PROBLEM is that the great powers are not willing to fully observe the embargoes, setting a precedent for smaller nations that conduct business with Sudan. Russia, for example, openly sells fighter jets to Sudan and opposes an embargo.

The Amnesty International report names, Belarus, China, France, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia as major suppliers of military hardware to the Sudanese government. It also mentions Belgium, Ireland, Israel, Poland, >

“Slaughter of men with rifles and ammunition made in France or Iran”



Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the USA as smaller suppliers.

Efforts in the international community to cut off Sudan's petrol industry, squeezing its main supply of hard currency, are opposed by France and China, which have oil firms in the country.

RUSSIAN MIG-29 FIGHTER JETS are only a small part of a repertoire available to the Sudanese government. T55M battle tanks from Belarus, Russian MI-24 helicopter gunships, Chinese Antonov An-12 freighter aircraft, and Kalashnikov assault rifles are readily available due to lax export regulations in several countries.

Jan Egeland, United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and author of the Amnesty report, says:

– The only thing in abundance in Darfur is weapons. It is easier to get a Kalashnikov than a loaf of bread. ■



Russian fighterjets are used bomb civilian targets in Sudan.



The violence in Sudan has made many flee into neighbouring countries.

MILITARY EQUIPMENT SOLD TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN

Russia

MiG-29 Fighter jets
MI-24 Helicopter gunships
BTR-80A Armoured Vehicles

Belarus

MI-24B Helicopter gunships
T55M Battle tanks

Iran

Pistols, bombs, hand grenades,
ammunition, land mines

France

Rifles, pistols, hand grenades

China

F-7 Supersonic jet fighters
Z-6 Attack helicopters
Antonov An-12 freighter aircraft
Rifles, pistols, land mines

Saudi Arabia

Military support equipment

Source: Amnesty International, 16.11.2004

What is being done?

We asked John Tackaberry from Amnesty International Canada, what course of action they recommend for Canadians.

Has Amnesty received any reactions from any of the countries indicted after the article was released?

– Not really...

What is the best way for the international community to respond to those countries breaching arms embargoes to the Sudan?

– We can appeal to United Nations Security Council to impose a mandatory embargo to halt ability of these countries to provide these weapons. Other ways are to pressure on individual governments, sort of naming and

shaming and making the world aware that these governments are supplying weapons that can be used in contribution of human rights violations.

What should Canada do and what has their response been?

– The Prime Minister has undertaken to take action with the government of Sudan, which claims they aren't responsible for the Janjaweed.

– The Canadian government needs to enforce the will of the international community to ensure the commitments already taken by government of Sudan are met, and bring to justice people in the Sudan who are responsible for violations.

– Officials should use their good offic-

es in whatever way they can to let the governments identified in the reports know that it's absolutely unacceptable for weapons to be introduced into a situation where they can be used in human rights violations.

What can individuals in Canada do to try to make a difference?

– We want to reinforce the message to individual Canadians that the Bashir government has a responsibility to fulfill its obligations. It has to bring Janjaweed under control and the human rights violations have to stop.

– Our role as human rights activists is to impress upon individual governments that they have a responsibility to human rights. ■

Surveillance and freedom at the Chinese Olympics



Claire Dawe

Multinational companies are bidding for the contract of supplying China surveillance equipment.

Huang Qi ran a website featuring articles on human rights and political issues, including material condemning the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. He was detained in June 2000, and sentenced in May 2003 to five years' imprisonment for internet related offences.

Zuang Yuhui is a Falun Gong practitioner who posted articles on the internet about the banned spiritual movement. He was detained in December 2000 and sentenced to ten years in prison.

Luo Yongzhong, a disabled shopkeeper, posted articles criticizing the Chinese government's treatment of the disabled and its response to the SARS outbreak. He was arrested and sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "endangering state secrets." He

was reportedly one of many arrested for "spreading rumours" and "false information" about SARS through the internet and by text messages.

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT had detained 61 'cyber-dissidents' according to a Reporters without Borders estimate in May 2004. They were charged with crimes such as 'incitement to subvert state power,' membership in a 'heretical organisation' and 'endangering state security,' and sentenced from two to twelve years' imprisonment.

Canadian telecommunications giant Nortel Networks will soon be aiding the Chinese government in tracking these "dissidents" with a state-of-the-art surveillance network dubbed the 'Golden Shield,' according to a new report by Rights and Democracy, a Canadian human rights organization.

SINCE THE COMMERCIALISATION of the internet in 1995, China has been one of the fastest growing markets in the world, with user numbers doubling every six months. This substantial growth has led to a government dilemma between openness and control where authorities wish to take advantage of the economic benefits while guarding against foreign economic domination and anti-government activity.

As Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji said, "The use

of information technology is vital for the world economy and social development." However, the internet is also an excellent forum for on-line debate, allowing pro-democracy groups and religious organisations to communicate ideas, generate support and plan demonstrations.

The Chinese government has reacted by developing new methods of surveillance and control.

Their first generation of defence was widely known as 'The Great Firewall of China'. It filtered and monitored network traffic at official international 'gateways'. This technology has recently become obsolete due to the considerable growth in the number and speed of connections.

THE 'GOLDEN SHIELD' project is the new solution. It is a nationwide digital surveillance network made possible by the expertise of a group of Western companies in which Nortel Networks plays a key role.

The shield focuses on individual surveillance rather than old style censorship. For example, it is capable of identifying and profiling internet users, monito- ➤

"It is capable of identifying and profiling internet users, monitoring telephone conversations"

The land of the free

Information on foreign nationals can be held in Americans customs and immigration databases indefinitely.

Without knowing why or how they get on the list, people are permanently marked as suspects and are unable to clear their name.

Big Brother syndrome

On an average day a person in a large British city can be filmed by more than 300 cameras.

A top priority

China spends US\$ 20 billion a year on telecommunications, or approximately 25% of the world market.



ring telephone conversations, and recognising individuals in a crowd.

Nortel is working with other companies and organisations to develop and promote a wide range of surveillance systems.

NORTEL REPRESENTATIVE Tina Warren describes the companies operations in terms of wireless communications and networking.

– We sell products in China that we sell in other countries around the world. Anything we sell in China we would also sell in any of the hundred and fifty countries in which we operate. We create the networking solutions to enable communication, to share information and knowledge. That’s what we do.”

In addition to severe penalties for dissidents, the Chinese authorities have introduced strict limitations for owning and operating internet cafes.

Now, with as part of the ‘War on Terrorism’ and in preparation for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade and expand surveillance systems in the country. ■



In our backyard

- Nortel is working on developing and promoting a wide range of surveillance systems including “personal internet” and internet monitoring, telephone communication interception, face and voice based recognition technology and video surveillance data transportation.
- Nortel Networks ‘Personal Internet’ will go even further than today’s surveillance technology in monitoring internet traffic, as government and industry build profiles of individual internet users.



Ernie Schibli

International rights groups show support for Guatemala indigenous people in gold mine debate

As Lidia de Vásquez ended her day of work at a Guatemalan environmental organization on November 30, armed men attacked her husband waiting outside in their car. A spokesperson for the organization, the Center for Environmental, Legal and Social Action of Guatemala (CALAS), interpreted this as an act of intimidation related to the organizations work, which includes campaigning on open pit mining exploitation licences.

I WAS AT CALAS LESS THAN three weeks earlier, joining the organization’s Director General, Dr. Yuri Giovanni Melini to present an open letter to the president of Guatemala, Oscar Berger, about a new an open pit gold and silver mine being opened in the municipalities of San Miguel Ixtajuacan and Sipacapa, in the department of San Marcos. Signed by over 70 organizations from Canada, the United States and throughout the world,

the letter calls for a delay in work on until the region’s indigenous population can make an informed decision about it.

A DAY EARLIER, I WAS AT A PRESS conference for local media in the city of San Marcos, alongside Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini, one of the country’s most prominent human rights defenders, who described concerns about the impact of the mine on the local community and the environment.

Those in favour of the mine include the government of Guatemala, the Canadian embassy, and the mining company. They argue that the mine will bring much needed investment into the country and provide jobs to people who are quite poor, saying that it will mean the construction of roads in the region, and that an NGO supported by the company will provide much needed social and economic services to the region.

The Movimiento de Trabajadores Catolicos (MTC) of San Marcos asked the SJC for help opposing further development of this mine on the grounds that:

GUATEMALA

US-Canada gold mine sparks indigenous resistance

Locals are concerned the mine will drain local water.



- People who would be most affected by the mine have not been adequately consulted.
- The mine will cause immense environmental damage to the soil and water thereby affecting the lives of thousands of (largely indigenous) people living in the region.
- Influx of foreign workers and a mining culture will negatively impact the lives of the local community.

People in the MTC also pointed out that the mine is Canadian owned. The company, Montana Mines, is a subsidiary of Glamis Gold, a Canadian-American enterprise with mines in the United States, Honduras and Mexico. Glamis is predicting that the San Marcos mine, which will have a life span of about ten years, will be its most profitable yet.

THE MOVIMENTO HAS JOINED with several other San Marcos organizations under the banner of the Frente por la Vida y la Paz. The environmental organizations, Madre Selva and CALAS have raised objections to the mine, along with Bishop Ramazzini and the Roman Catholic

bishops of Guatemala. More recently, the National Mayan Congress and the Plataforma Agraria joined their voices to the opposition.

The position adopted by the SJC and the signers of our letter is shared by Guatemalan indigenous organizations:

people of the region have the right to determine the type of development that will affect them.

This right is enshrined in the Guatemalan Peace Accords, and in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, which was signed and ratified by the Guatemalan government.

Unfortunately, the previous government passed a mining law that does not respect this right and makes mining much more attractive to foreign mining companies. Glamis and other companies

have flooded into Guatemala and obtained hundreds of exploration and exploitation permits.

THE SAN MARCOS MINE, and mining in general, continues to be debated in Guatemala. Scarcely a day goes by without some mention of it in the press.

In an article in the Prensa Libre newspaper in November, Canadian ambassador James Lambert wrote in glowing terms of Canadian mining technology.

He argued that there are many mines in Canada yet the country is still ranked highly by the United Nations for environmental protection.

Another article in the newspaper that week gave the results of a poll of 400 people in San Miguel Ixtahuacan and Sipacapa, who were asked whether they had been consulted on the mine. The newspaper claimed that 95% of the respondents replied that they had not. ■

“The mine will bring much needed investment into the country and provide jobs to people who are quite poor”

Rights defender speaks for indigenous people

This is an extract from an open letter Alvaro Ramazzini, Archbishop of the Diocese of San Marcos, wrote in September 2004 to the president of Guatemala.

San Marcos has been in the headlines for months because of the debate about a gold mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan.

It is a shame that often this region is known only for its conflicts and not for its natural beauty, its biological diversity, the customs and traditions of its communities, and the cultural richness of its ethnic groups - the Mams and Sipacapenses - and let's not forget the little town of Quiche, in Ixchiguan.

AS BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE of San Marcos, I have been looking, for fifteen years, for ways to truly put people first, and change the lives of the poor and eco-

nomically miserable majority of the inhabitants of this region. Now I would like to express my reflections on the theme of open-pit mining, in my name and the name of my colleagues.

Mining companies come to this country to make money. The companies have their own indicators that determine how much money they will invest. In general, according to reports I've read, mining projects should indicate a profit margin of more than 15% on capital investments.

Individual investors want to know that they will make a return of 30 to 50% be-

fore deciding to invest in a mining project.

A MINING COMPANY WILL INVEST in countries where the laws governing mining constitute an open door. This is the case for Guatemala. There are laws and international treaties signed by the government, but we all know that there are many quasi-legal procedures that are used to give the public appearance of compliance with the law. We don't have a real democracy. Public consultation that takes place on themes that affect a community is restricted to very small groups or sectors of that population.

Before starting business, a mining company should not only make sure that everything is in conformity with the law,

“The mine will bring much needed investment into the country and provide jobs to people who are quite poor”

Alvaro Ramazzini is Archbishop of the Diocese of San Marcos, Guatemala. Active in the defence of human rights, he has been the target of death threats because of his work mediating land conflict, such as the peasant occupation of the San Luis estate in the north-western highlands. He worked closely with Bishop Juan Gerardi on the Recovery of Historical Memory Project investigating human rights abuses committed during the civil war. (Bishop Gerardi was brutally murdered two days after the 1998 release of the project report.)

San Marcos farmers of organic coffee seek alternatives to mining.



but also that the communities in which they will be conducting business are not resisting, that there be a harmonious relationship between the mining company and these communities.

The mining company will surely put forth the benefits of its localization in the country: encouraging investment, job creation, social assistance to communities, creating educational opportunities, creation of infrastructure, the purchase of real estate at prices exceeding their value, and above all, insisting that the environmental damage caused by mining activity will be minimal.

AS TO THESE WONDERFUL CLAIMS, I ask myself how many jobs will be for local community members. One thousand, fifteen hundred? For how long - two, three or ten years? How many jobs will remain, in reality, ten years from now? What will be the country gain in real economic terms?

All human beings have the right and the capacity to be merchants and conduct business. Nonetheless, there are many things that cannot be treated as commodities: the air we breathe, the water we drink, our fauna and flora, and our natural beauty, to give a few

examples. Who should defend against the commercialisation of these basic goods and services of such vital urgency to people? Will it be private initiative, government, or the people themselves? Can we, in the name of this commercial activity, gravely injure life?

Mining extraction can cause contamination, and damage to flora and fauna. It can also cause social tension, as we've seen in Sipacapa, where people have confirmed that they have seen armed individuals travelling in vehicles with tinted windows.

The mining company insists that it needs protection, and for that has private security.

It is important not to forget that Sipacapa lived a very intense armed conflict whose memory ➤

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The community fights back

Ernie Schibli Interviews with Graciela Arely Hernández of the Movimiento de Trabajadores Campesinos (Peasant Labour Movement) in San Marcos, Guatemala.

What are your main goals?

– I work in what we call the “Culture of peace and solidarity program”, to strengthen Mayan cultural and spiritual values, along with principles of pastoral theology.

– Support has to be moral and spiritual, so we can strengthen the struggle to defend our rights. In practical terms, we help campesino families in a difficult situation because of the coffee crisis, bringing them food and medical help.

– We know this only treats the symptoms. So we also put pressure on the

government to take up its responsibilities with the campesino groups. This is accompanied by awareness-raising. We use mostly radio, talking about the situations on the plantations and about mining.

What are your next steps?

– We have to add a gender focus. Despite the fact that 52% of the members of our community are women, this is not reflected in the how we are represented. We want to be part of the government, to take up more responsibilities.

– In society in general, women are seen as reproductive machines and cheaper labour. We work just like men but do not receive the same salary or social benefits.

– Women must not be seen as passive

beings any more, but as active participants in the process of development.

What help can we give?

– We try to promote solidarity of the poor with the poor, so as not to always rely on help from international solidarity, but international solidarity does allow campesino families to continue their struggle.

– Let me quote from campesino families that have received help from international solidarity: “Thanks for the food and health aid, but more important than that for us is to know that there are people in Canada that think about us, that there are foreign brothers and sisters who are interested in us. Visits from Father Ernie and others give us strength to continue.” ■

still reverberates in the community.

MINING CAN CREATE SOCIAL inequality and the destabilization of family life and the life of the community in general. Once the company begins operations, workers come from outside the community with their own customs and sometimes their own prejudices. Alcoholism increases, prostitution appears. Work opportunities in mines are usually for men, meanwhile it is the women who are left to face most of the social problems associated with mining; family violence, the man's arrogance because he has the money.

After a mine has been exploited, the affected area is not left as it was found. Whatever was the previous use of the land, the reclamation, that is to say, restoring the land to an acceptable condition takes five to ten years. Who would be in charge of making sure that the land reclamation takes place - the mining company that has already left town, the community that sold the land, or the state which allowed the mining to take place?

In time, when the gold mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan is closed, who will verify that the clean-up is carried out? Will the mining company or the state

assess the damage cause by the acid drainage and ensure that the damage is avoided?

In the case of mineral exploitation in San Miguel Ixtahuacàn, we found out about the project too late. If we had known about it beforehand, two years ago, we would have dedicated ourselves to stopping it. Today, the system of law in Guatemala has our hands tied. Nonetheless, this project threatens the well-being of our country, the future of our natural environment, the preservation of our natural resources and the use of them for the good of all Guatemalans in the defence of life and with respect for our biodiversity. Who can change this situation?

WHAT REMAINS CLEAR is that from now on we must impede, at all costs, any mining activity in our country. We must mobilize all of our forces to achieve this, from legal actions to peaceful resistance in the communities. In ten years, if God still gives us life, we'll see who was right: the defenders of mining activity, convinced of its benefits, or those who oppose it, convinced by the terrible consequences that have been experienced and studied in other countries. I hope it's not too late. ■

Chiapas

struggles with the future

Zabia El-Masri

With the massacre in Acteal fresh in their mind, indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico, try to create a future for their people.

Seven years ago this December, paramilitaries attacked the community of Acteal in Chiapas, Mexico, on a day of fasting and prayer. Men, women and children were kneeling in the church when the massacre began. Forty-five people were killed, as young as two months old.

Representatives of Las Abejas and Maya Vinic Coffee Producers, Montreal in November.



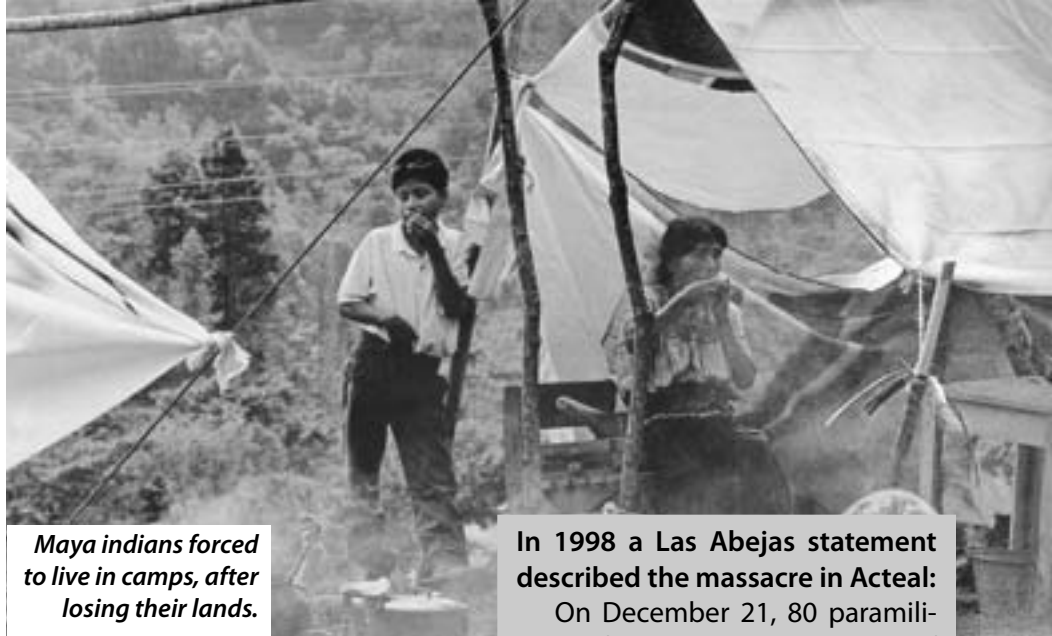
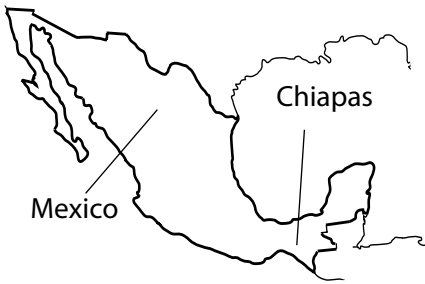
The Peasant Labour Movement wants a stronger voice for indigenous women.



Two enthusiastic young men from the community recently came to Canada to tell the story of their indigenous community and its struggle for justice.

JOSE VAZQUEZ PEREZ, president of the Las Abejas ("The Bees") civil society organization, and Macario Arias, president of the Maya Vinic Coffee Producers' Cooperative, spoke about their hope for a safer and more prosperous future. Emphasizing the importance of keeping alive the memories of those who were killed in Acteal, they spoke about how the members of Las Abejas were forced to flee their homes and lands.

When they were finally able to return, the lands had to be re-worked, and the people had to face their village again, and their terrors. They took control of



Maya indians forced to live in camps, after losing their lands.

In 1998 a Las Abejas statement described the massacre in Acteal:

On December 21, 80 paramilitaries from the communities of Los Chorros, Quextic and Canolal joined forces in La Esperanza to prepare the massacre.

At 10.45 the following morning they carried out the massacre in Acteal while we were praying for an end to the war.

The shooting lasted for four hours. Those of us who escaped death telephoned the Diocese of San Cristobal, which in turn informed the Secretary of the Interior for the State of Chiapas, Homero Tovilla Cristiani, who responded that all was quiet and that nothing was happening.

At 6 o'clock in the evening he was phoned again to request his intervention, but he responded that there had only been four shots. At 10 o'clock that evening, Bishop Samuel Ruiz phoned Homer Tovilla to ask for his help in rescuing the injured: he responded by saying that there had only been a few shots and one death.

At three o'clock in the morning of the 23rd, the Sub-Secretary of the Interior for Chiapas, Uriel Jarquin, carried out the "clean up operation". Our dead were taken to the State capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez, where they were hidden so that the press couldn't take photographs and they could disguise the fact that the massacre had been carried out with the complicity of the government..

their lives again, and turned a tragedy into new hope for future generations.

MAINTAINING THEIR BELIEF in non-violence, and struggling to obtain justice for those who were murdered, the Las Abejas launched a "campana contra la impunidad" to make accountable the executors of the massacre, who remain unpunished. They want to raise public awareness about what happened at Acteal and about their current struggles, and to ensure that the current situation is seen as a political struggle, and not a religious one as the Mexican government maintains.

The San Andres Peace Accord that followed the January 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) is considered imperative to indigenous peoples. It would grant them legal recognition as subjects of laws and rights, and would give them control of natural resources on their territories. The government has not abided by the peace agreement, which has not been ratified by the government nor implemented.

IN 2003, THE LAS ABEJAS coffee cooperative, Maya Vinic, went commercial on a

In Montreal, Maya Vinic fair trade coffee can be purchased at Café Rico, 969 Rachel Est. To find other locations, please visit: www.javaforjustice.com

National and International level. Today Maya Vinic is in the transitional stage of obtaining Organic Certification. During our interview with Jose and Macario, they told us that Las Abejas is also in the process of starting its own production of honey and handcrafts. Their convictions have led them to develop and preserve their community, culture and heritage, while respecting and preserving their land. This small organization has demonstrated that sustainable development is possible.

Unfortunately, farmers in Chiapas, such as the members of Las Abejas, are in a similar plight as farmers elsewhere facing market changes.

IN QUEBEC, SMALL FAMILY-OWNED farms are disappearing at the rate of three per day. Whether it is beef, dairy or grain producers, it is becoming increasingly hard for farmers to resist the downward pressures on prices from large corporations. If present trends continue, the number of milk producers could plummet from 8000 to 300 in coming years.

Despite the challenges facing small farmers throughout the Americas, this small organization in Chiapas is defying predictions and trying to grow, while maintaining its principles of respect towards Mother Earth. ■

“They took control of their lives again, and turned a tragedy into new hope for future generations”

Mexican pyramids threatened by Wal-Mart

Local residents oppose a Walmart being built close to archaeological site. UNESCO promises to investigate.

Less than two kilometres from the heart of the Mexican archaeological zone of Teotihuacan and its awe-inspiring pyramids, the retail giant WalMart is



The temple of the sun in Teotihuacan.

overcoming the resistance of a group of local residents and, to the amazement of UNESCO, is building one of its hypermarkets.

THE NEW STORE GOING IN near the Teotihuacan citadel, 50 km north of Mexico City, is almost complete. It is being built on land where a vibrant culture whose history is still full of enigmas flourished hundreds of years ago.

“We’ll put a stop to this with demolition, because a transnational corporation can’t just come and trample on our historical patrimony,” Lorenzo Trujillo, head of the Civic Front for the Defence of the Valley of Teotihuacan, a group that represents some 100 local residents from the area around the world-renowned archaeological zone, told IPS.

With the backing of municipal permits and authorization from the National Institute of Archaeology and History,

Diego Cevallos

WalMart is building its new store on a 1.5 hectare plot of land which forms part of the nearly 500 hectares that are left of Tollan Teotihuacan, an indigenous name that means “Where Men Become Gods”.

The store’s neighbours are the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, the numerous temples and the Avenue of the Dead in Teotihuacan, estimated to be more than 1,400 years old.

The construction of the store “is absurd, but in this country, anything can happen,” said Lorenzo.

IN RESPONSE TO THE CIVIC Front’s protests, the governmental National Council for Culture and the Arts promised that it would review the legal aspects of the project, about which it claims to have received no prior notice before construction began. UNESCO also said it would investigate.

Teotihuacan is a religious citadel built at the dawn of the Christian era, reaching its peak of splendour between the years 450 and 600 AC, but by the year 700 residents had left the area for unknown reasons.

The citadel originally covered about 3,500 hectares. With the passage of time, towns grew up around it, leaving unoccupied only the main ceremonial centres, where the pyramids are located, and a “buffer zone” where construction is limited.

That zone, where WalMart is building, has gradually shrunk.

Wal-Mart has 652 stores in Mexico. ■
Mexico City, Sep 3(IPS)

Interview with Jaime Lagunez of the El Frente Civico, Mexico.

What actions have you taken?

On November 18 we protested at the offices of the National Commission of Human Rights because of the archaeological destruction in Teotihuacan, with a second action at a Walmart in Mexico City.

Why wasn’t the construction of the Wal-Mart in Teotihuacán stopped?

Authorities claimed they tried to stop the construction, but were either “not able” to because of unknown restrictions or blamed each other for the “mistake”. We consider that Wal-Mart should not be working in the country, much less within the archaeological zone..

Do you think that the struggle carry a message or a lesson for people outside Mexico?

Yes, what happened in Mexico can happen elsewhere. We cannot allow for these companies to destroy our environment and erase our hopes of enjoying our cultural heritage. Our identities are at risk but also our sources of income. Big stores destroy local small businesses, and in the cases of Teotihuacan income from tourism is very much at risk. This could be the same story in Canada, U.S. or overseas.

Quetzacuatl, the Aztec serpent god, watches over the ruins.





Karen Joyner

Canada not ready to push for poor country voice at the World Bank.

We have heard from the Executive Director's Office representing Canada at the World Bank that it has no intention of playing a leading role in the continuing "voice" dialogue at the World Bank.

The office thanked us for the contribution of the recent SJC paper on voice (see Strengthening the voice of poor countries Upstream Journal Sept/Oct 2004), there is no immediate intention to take up any of the recommendations

it contains.

This is disappointing since the constituency Canada represents at the World Bank includes a Heavily Indebted Poor Country – seemingly putting it in an ideal position to understand the practical demands of enhancing Voice of poor countries at the institution. It is even more disappointing because a large number of our recommendations in the paper arose from conversations with staffs at this office and its equivalent at the IMF. For now, we will redirect our advocacy efforts toward the Finance Canada in Ottawa. ■

Debt at the IFI Annual Meetings

Behind the scenes at the World Bank meetings on debt relief.

The Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief program is not working, and as the decision makers ponder what to do next, civil society groups that were responsible for getting the problem on the agenda are being sidelined.

Debt relief has re-emerged as an issue of heated discussion at important gatherings like the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF in October. Debt is back in the spotlight because of the obvious failings of the HIPC Initiative, the looming 2015 Millennium Development Goals, and new borrowing for poverty reduction raises debt levels in poor countries.

Yet at the 2004 Annual Meetings, a key discussion on debt was closed to

NGOs. At this meeting, in which conversation was lively and practical, there was a heated exchange on the record of the HIPC Initiative. The panel included a government official from a country needing debt relief, an academic, and a person from an aid agency. (In case you were wondering, yes, I snuck in – an entertaining story in itself.)

In sharp contrast to this seminar, held in a plush salon in the main World Bank building, the meeting for NGOs was in a small basement room, Panelists included a representative of a European NGO network and Jack Jones Zulu of Jubilee 2000 Zambia, along with the director of the recently established Debt Department of the World Bank, Vikram Nehru, and IMF represen-

Gauging human impacts

The Canadian International Development Agency has responded to the SJC push to get engaged with the World Bank's Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) process, and produced a paper outlining possible steps forward. A follow-up to a learning event we organized with CIDA in May 2004, it proposes working with NGOs and research institutes to build poor country capacity to undertake PSIA's.

To further encourage Canadian government engagement in analyzing the social impacts of World Bank and IMF programs, the SJC organized a meeting between World Bank staff working on PSIA in October 2004. Staff from various departments and from the offices representing Canada at the World Bank and IMF joined the SJC in a lively conversation on process and content issues. We also discussed specific work being conducted on the reform of crop boards Tanzania and education in Mozambique - both countries of strategic focus for CIDA resources. Please see the website for further details.

tative Mark Plant.

This reflected the lack of respect for the role NGOs have played in the debt dialogue to date. Mr. Nehru contradicted both NGO presenters by stating that the HIPC Initiative was not designed to fully address debt sustainability problems in HIPCs.

Mr. Nehru was not working on debt for the World Bank when the HIPC Initiative was designed so it is possible he has not read all of the

“This reflected the lack of respect for the role NGOs have played in the debt dialogue”

papers his employing institution produced on the HIPC Initiative over the years. I could point him to several references in these papers over the years supporting the claims of the NGO pre- ➤

senters – that indeed, the Initiative’s goal was to provide robust debt sustainability for participating countries and to achieve a permanent exit from debt rescheduling mechanisms.

Mr. Plant takes up the debt portfolio for the IMF late in the day as well, at least compared with many of the NGO participants in the room. At one point he demonstrated his lack of fluency in the history of the debt campaign by sarcastically asking NGOs present how we could justify further debt relief for HIPC’s whilst non-HIPC’s languished with no such treatment.

To Mr. Plant I would point to any number of NGO positions statements over the years calling for debt relief for countries not classified as HIPC’s.

Another recent example of NGOs being shut out of the debt dialogue is the fact that a key document explaining how debt sustainability ratios will be used to determine World Bank lending in the future was not made public in time for NGOs to make informed submissions to the process.

The draft document was posted on the World Bank website with a gaping hole where the debt information would be.

This is an unfortunate time for the debt dialogue to be so compromised.

There is some truly creative dialogue taking place between donors and HIPC governments, and an acceptance of the importance of debt that was not present when the great strides of the debt relief movement were made.

Embracing more fully the wealth of knowledge from the NGO community could contribute to the fruitfulness of current debt discussions. ■

Choosing new WB president

Need for fair and transparent selection process.

Next June the second term of World Bank President James Wolfensohn comes to an end. Who will replace him, and by what process, are questions of concern to civil society groups wanting reform of the World Bank, not to mention the citizens of countries that rely on the institution for development resources.

Yet there is no formal selection process for either the President of the World Bank or the Managing Director of the IMF, but there is an understanding that the president of the World Bank will be from the United States and the Managing Director of the IMF from Western Europe.

Of course, all would agree that it is important that the best person be found for the job at hand, regardless of nationality, but given the strength of the United

States on the Board of the World Bank, it would take some considerable political will from other significant members to challenge this tradition.

THE APPOINTMENT OF Horst Köhler as Managing Director of the IMF in 2000 brought public criticism of the process. In response the IMF Board agreed that a “plurality of candidates representing the

“Such minimal progress is shameful”

diversity of members across regions would be in the best interests of the Fund; the goal is to attract the best candidates regardless of nationality.”

Following the appointment of Mr. Köhler, IMF and the World Bank launched a review of the selection process, which recommended that “Executive Directors should establish clear criteria for identifying, nominating, and selecting qualified candidates for the posts,” and that “transparency and accountability are critical.”

They made no reference to the need for a plurality of nationalities represented amongst the candidates, implying that this recommendation was lost when the World Bank’s selection process was considered.

THE IMF’S SELECTION PROCESS in 2004 and the appointment of Rodrigo de Rato’s as Managing Director was more efficient than that of Mr Köhler, but little was truly changed in the process. A non-Western European was put forward (as was the case for the first time in 2000), but again a Western European won the post.

Such minimal progress is shameful.

The failure to significantly improve the processes for selecting the heads of the World Bank and IMF is a significant disappointment in terms of improving governance of the institutions. We need to see a revival of the process begun in 2000 in time to change the coming selection process for the World Bank President. The least we should expect is implementation of the recommendations made in 2001. ■

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The new Conquistadors

Over 500 years ago, the conquistadors conquered the indigenous people of Mesoamerica and half a continent in their search for gold and other precious metals. In Guatemala, they didn't find the gold they sought, but they did find good fertile land. So they built their haciendas, and enslaved, killed or drove into the mountains the indigenous people.

In time, some of these conquerors became incredibly rich, thanks to coffee, cotton, cardamom and a host of other natural resources. As for the original inhabitants, they huddled in small poverty-stricken settlements or eventually made their way to the cities where they ended up living in similar squalor.

Now large plantations, owned by a few wealthy families, now cover much of the good land. They employ thousands of campesinos, some of whom live on small plots in the middle of the plantations, while others are trucked down to work the fields during harvest time.

The field workers live in miserable conditions and are paid a mere pittance. Guatemala City's barrios burst at the seams as hundreds of thousands of penniless campesinos search for the jobs that are not there. In the highlands, their brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers scratch a living from the hard, unyielding land, ignored by their political and economic masters.

Yet, there is something new.

Strangers have come to the highlands, this time from the north rather than the east. Helicopters crisscross the highland skies. Huge machines carve out new roads while others tear down the trees. Fences and armed guards block traditional paths, keeping people from their fields and friends. The strangers have found what the conquistadors searched for in vain.

Gold.

The strangers have started to tear apart the land as they dig the open-pit mine. The trees are the first to go, then the land itself. Millions of litres of water will be diverted, contaminated by cyanide and then returned to the earth to wreak God-

knows-what havoc. Huge profits will be made by and for the foreigners. What will remain are a tear in the fabric of the earth and a way of life destroyed by a clash of cultures.

Far away, in Guatemala City, a succession of governments, each seemingly more corrupt than its predecessor, decided that Guatemala needs more investment and that mining would provide it. It doesn't seem to matter to them that people live where the mines will be dug – they can move, just as they have moved for some five hundred years whenever “the good of the country” required it. Why, some of them, a lucky few, whose land is required for the mine, will even get a quite a bit of money while others still might even get some jobs.

“Huge profits will be made by and for the foreigners”

If the rights of people to determine their own development or international treaties stand in the way, they'll draft new laws that disregard them. So, a new mining law was born that largely disregarded the rights of the indigenous people, the peace accords and Guatemala's commitments under Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization.

It is much more attractive to the international mining community and so the foreigners are flooding in. Only, this time the foreigners are largely Canadians and Americans. To compound matters, the government of Canada is throwing its support behind the mining companies.

Would it be too much to ask the government of Guatemala to conduct transparent and fair hearings on mining in Guatemala? Could not the Canadian government, so quick to call for democracy in Guatemala and around the world, encourage the Guatemalan government to conduct these hearings instead of just championing the mining industry? Might it not be the time for all of us to question our need for gold rings and other jewellery? After all, their cost is not only the price we pay at the store. ■

Ernie Schibli is a founding member of the SJC and our coordinator of public education programs. ernie@s-j-c.net



The Social Justice Committee of Montreal has been working to raise awareness of the root causes of hunger, poverty and repression in the world through our education programs since 1975. We work in solidarity with organizations in a number of Third World countries in the search for a more just and sustainable global socio-economic system.

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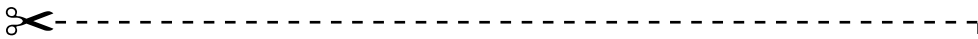
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